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Conexant Renews Push Into DOCSIS Chip Market

Vendor Hopes to Leapfrog Broadcom by Offering First Fully-Programmable Cable Modem MAC

After some early missteps in the cable modem chip business, Conexant Systems Inc. (formerly Rockwell Semiconductor Systems) has regrouped in an effort to challenge market-leader Broadcom Corp. Conexant's plan: deliver the industry's most integrated and cost-effective cable modem silicon solution within six months.

In December 1998, Conexant began sampling its new CN9414 DOCSIS cable modem silicon to an undisclosed alpha customer. It is the first single-chip design to include an integrated microprocessor and offer fully-programmable media access control (MAC) functionality. The CN9414 includes a full DOCSIS physical layer (PHY) with 64/256 QAM demodulator and QPSK/16 QAM burst modulator, 10/100 Ethernet MAC, Universal Serial Bus (USB) transceiver, 40/56-bit encryption engine, and 100-Mbps Media Independent Interface (MII). Conexant has also developed a dual-conversion RF tuner in silicon that it plans to offer with the CN9414.

Conexant will begin sampling the CN9414 to a wider range of customers in May with volume production scheduled for the third quarter of 1999. The CN9414 will carry a list price of \$45 in 10,000-unit quantities. Cable modems built with the chip are expected to start shipping early in the fourth quarter.

"What we've done is essentially take everything that's on an external cable modem and integrated it. The only thing really remaining is the memory outboard, Ethernet transceiver and maybe a flash device," said Jay Kshatri, Conexant's director of cable modems. "With this chip, a bill of materials for a complete external cable modem, either Ethernet or USB or both, is well below \$100."

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With this cost basis, Kshatri says manufacturers will be able to deliver external cable modems at a sub-\$200 retail price point by the end of 1999.

In addition to price, Conexant believes its programmable MAC will offer a major advantage for cable modem manufactures as they work to migrate from DOCSIS 1.0 to the 1.1 standard this year.

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